

America, Iran, and Operation Ajax: The Burden of the Past

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By Steven LaTulippe

The news has been abuzz recently with stories about President Bush's alleged plans for "regime change" in Iran. Just last week, rumors were reported of US Air Force fighters violating Iranian air space for the purposes of testing their air defense system. As the nuclear crisis continues to simmer, the next incursions may be of a more belligerent nature.

Obviously, America's relationship with Iran has been extremely hostile over the past several decades. From the perspective of most Americans, the seminal event of US-Iranian relations was the siege of the US embassy in Tehran and the subsequent holding of its staff as hostages back in the 1970s.

Although that hostage-taking was brutal and unjustified, many Americans lack a more global perspective of the history of American interactions with Persia. One of the most critical events in that relationship occurred over 50 years ago during the Eisenhower Administration. While Americans may know little about Operation Ajax, its memory still evokes intense anger from nearly every Iranian.



The brief version (for a more thorough history of the events surrounding Operation Ajax, I refer the reader to Sandra Mackey's excellent book *The Iranians*) concerns the overthrow of Muhammad Mossadeq's short-lived, democratic government by the CIA in 1953 and the reinstallation of the Shah to the throne of Iran.

In 1951, the control of Iran's oil fields by a British company (the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, or AIOC) became a hot political topic. The Iranian people believed, with some justification, that the existing deal between the Iranian government and AIOC unfairly benefited the company. Muhammad Mossadeq, then a

member of the Iranian parliament, took the lead in demanding a renegotiation of the pact. The masses of the Iranian people rallied to his standard and quickly made him the most revered leader in the land. The Shah, who then ruled as an authoritarian monarch, lost control of events as his previously powerless parliament (the Majlis) took on a life of its own.

As Mackay notes:

With Mossadeq leading the charge against Iran's economic master, the Majlis, on March 15, boldly nationalized the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company...On April 29, the same Majlis elected Muhammad Mossadeq prime minister. While the shah sat on the throne as a mere shadow, Muhammad Mossadeq basked in the acclaim of the vast majority of Iranians, who for the first time in decades gave their genuine respect, devotion, and loyalty to their recognized leader.

While I certainly don't condone his socialistic tendencies or his seizure of the oilfields, it is undeniable that by the time of his elevation to prime minister, Mossadeq had the backing of the overwhelming majority of the Iranian population. For the first time in its long history, Iran had a democratically elected leader.

By 1953, Mossadeq was in an increasingly difficult situation. Oil revenues had plummeted due to a boycott of Iranian oil and the economy slumped. The Soviet-backed Iranian communist party was becoming increasingly aggressive, and Washington began to worry. Iran was a vital chess piece in the Cold War and the American oil companies had their eyes on future concessions there. Mossadeq had become an "issue" for some very powerful people.

Eventually, the decision was made in Washington that Mossadeq had to go. Brigadier General Norman Schwarzkopf (father of the Gulf War commander) and CIA guru Kermit Roosevelt (grandson of Teddy) were ordered to begin a covert operation designed to remove Mossadeq and restore the Shah to absolute authority. A complex plot, codenamed Operation Ajax, was conceived and executed from the US Embassy in Tehran.

Using CIA assets in the Iranian military and various minor political parties, an uprising was staged.

Mackey describes the climax:

For nine hours, the pro-shah army, utilizing American-style military strategy and logistics, battled pro-Mossadeq demonstrators. At least 300 people died. By nightfall, the Mossadeq partisans had drawn into a tight cordon around the premier's palace. Inside, the aged and always ailing prime minister threw a coat over his pajamas, leaped over the garden wall, and went into hiding. Forty-eight hours later he was arrested. The brief euphoric moment when the followers of Mossadeq believed that he held Iran's destiny in his hands evaporated.

The Shah, who had fled to Rome at the first whiff of gunpowder, rode back to power on the tip of American bayonets.

In essence, the United States had engaged in a massive covert operation designed to remove a democratically elected leader from power and reinstall an authoritarian monarch (a move which makes a mockery of our currently stated desire to "spread democracy" in the Middle East).

This affair had several disastrous ramifications for the future of American-Iranian relations. First, the Shah, from that point forward, was viewed as a creature of America. Consequently, America became an accessory to his every oppressive act during the subsequent 26 years of his rule. Second, the American embassy in Tehran was permanently marked as a "nest of spies" in the eyes of the Iranian populace. And third, Iranian democracy was strangled in its crib. The next time the populace rose to overthrow the Shah (in the 1970s), they viewed America as their enemy and were cheering a leader who was significantly less democratic than Mossadeq. When rumors began circulating that the Americans were going to bring the Shah back via yet another covert operation, the Iranian mobs responded by seizing the US embassy in Tehran and holding its workers hostage. If Mossadeq's regime had been permitted to continue, it is entirely possible that Iran could have evolved into an authentic democracy. American interventionism destroyed that opportunity and set the stage for many of the tragedies currently haunting the Middle East. If America is ever to have even remotely cordial relations with Iran, we must accept responsibility for the terrible effects of Operation Ajax and admit that we had no right to intervene in a controversy that was wholly the business of the Iranian people. That exploit was unworthy of the Land of Washington and Jefferson.

While the American public often quickly forgets the interventions and mischievous actions of its government, our overseas victims seldom do. The current climate of international terrorism should prompt the American people to take a more active interest, since these transgressions often come back to haunt us in the most unexpected ways.

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U.S. and Them: Operation Ajax - Iran and the CIA coup (1/2)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oi-JiM0Ox_8

U.S. and Them: Operation Ajax - Iran and the CIA coup (2/2)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mdeoktnv8ko>

The American War-Machine, A Lesson in Blowback, and The Greatest Speech Ever Written <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZ7Hz7WCQE8>

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<http://www.lewrockwell.com/latulippe/latulippe41.html>

Operation Praying Mantis

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Operation Praying Mantis was an attack on April 18, 1988, by U.S. naval forces within Iranian territorial waters in retaliation for the Iranian mining of the Persian Gulf during the Iran–Iraq war and the subsequent damage to an American warship.

On 14 April, the guided missile frigate USS Samuel B. Roberts struck a mine while deployed in the Persian Gulf as part of Operation Earnest Will, the 1987–88 convoy missions in which U.S. warships escorted reflagged Kuwaiti oil tankers to protect them from Iranian attacks. The explosion blew a 25-foot (7.6-meter) hole in the Roberts's hull and nearly sank it. The crew saved their ship with no loss of life, and Roberts was towed to Dubai on 16 April. After the mining, U.S. Navy divers recovered other mines in the area. When the serial numbers were found to match those of mines seized along with the Iran Ajr the previous September, U.S. military officials planned a retaliatory operation against Iranian targets in the Persian Gulf.



The attack by the U.S. helped pressure Iran to agree to a ceasefire with Iraq later that summer, ending the eight-year conflict between the Persian Gulf neighbors.[2]

On November 6, 2003, the International Court of Justice ruled that "the actions of the United States of America against Iranian oil platforms on 19 October 1987 (Operation Nimble Archer) and 18 April 1988 (Operation Praying Mantis) cannot be justified as measures necessary to protect the essential security interests of the United States of America." The International Court of Justice also dismissed Iran's claim that the attack by United States Navy was a breach of the 1955 Treaty of Amity between the two countries.[3]



This battle was the largest of the five major U.S. surface engagements since the Second World War, which also include the Battle of Chumonchin Chan during the Korean War, the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the Battle of Dong Hoi during the Vietnam War, and the Action in the Gulf of Sidra in 1986. It also marked the U.S. Navy's first exchange of anti-ship missiles by ships.

Battle

On 18 April, the U.S. Navy attacked with several groups of surface warships, plus aircraft from the carrier USS Enterprise (CVN-65), and her ASW/AAW escort USS Truxtun (CGN-35). The action began with coordinated strikes by two surface groups.



One surface action group, or SAG, consisting of the destroyers USS Merrill (DD 976) and USS Lynde McCormick (DDG 8), plus the amphibious transport dock USS Trenton (LPD-14) and its embarked Marine Air Ground Task Force, was ordered to destroy the guns and other military facilities on the Sassan oil platform. At 8 am, the SAG commander, who was also the commander of Destroyer Squadron 9, ordered the Merrill to radio a warning to the occupants of the platform, telling them to abandon it. The SAG waited 20 minutes, then opened fire. The oil platform fired back with twin-barrelled 23mm ZU-23 guns. The SAG's guns eventually disabled some of the ZU-23s, and platform occupants radioed a request for a cease-fire. The SAG complied. After a tug carrying more personnel had cleared the area, the ships resumed exchanging fire with the remaining ZU-23s, and ultimately disabled them. Cobra gunships completed the destruction of enemy resistance. The Marines boarded the platform, and recovered a single wounded survivor (who was transported to Bahrain), some small arms, and intelligence. The Marines planted explosives, left the platform, and set them off. The SAG was then ordered to proceed north to the Rakhsh oil platform to destroy it.

As the SAG departed the Sassan oil field, two Iranian F-4s made an attack run, but broke off when the Lynde McCormick locked its fire control radar on the aircraft. Halfway to the Rakhsh oil platform, the attack was called off in an attempt to ease pressure on the Iranians and signal a desire for de-escalation.

The other group, which included guided missile cruiser Wainwright and frigates Simpson and Bagley, attacked the Sirri oil platform. The SEALs were assigned to capture, occupy and destroy the Sirri platform but due to heavy pre-assault damage from Naval Gunfire, it was determined that an assault was not required.



Iran responded by dispatching Boghammar speedboats to attack various targets in the Persian Gulf, including the American-flagged supply ship Willy Tide, the Panamanian-flagged Scan Bay and the British tanker York Marine. All of these vessels were damaged in different degrees. After the attacks, A-6E Intruder aircraft launched from CVN 65 were directed to the speedboats by an American frigate. The two aircraft, piloted by "Lizards" Lieutenant

Commander James Engler and Lieutenant Paul Webb, dropped Rockeye cluster bombs on the speedboats, sinking one and damaging several others, which then fled to the Iranian-controlled island of Abu Musa.[4]

Action continued to escalate. The Joshan, an Iranian Combattante II Kaman-class fast attack craft, challenged USS Wainwright (CG-28) and Surface Action Group Charlie. The commanding officer of USS Wainwright directed a final warning (of a series of warnings) stating that the Joshan was to "stop your engines, abandon ship, I intend to sink you". Joshan responded by firing a Harpoon missile at them.[5] The USS Simpson (FFG-56) responded to the challenge by firing two Standard missiles, while Wainwright followed with one Standard missile.[5] The attacks destroyed the Iranian ship's superstructure but did not immediately sink it, so USS Bagley (FF-1069) fired a Harpoon of its own; the missile did not find the target. SAG Charlie closed on the Joshan, with Simpson, then Bagley and Wainwright firing guns to sink the crippled Iranian ship.[5]



Two Iranian F-4 Phantom fighters then approached the Wainwright. One fighter left the area soon after the cruiser placed its 55B Fire Control Radar in search mode. The second fighter made a low-altitude approach towards the warship, which responded by firing two SM-2 missiles at the fighter. One hit the Iranian aircraft, blowing off part of its wing and peppering the fuselage with shrapnel. The Iranian pilot managed to land his damaged airplane at Bandar Abbas.[5]

Fighting continued when the Iranian frigate IS Sahand (F74) departed Bandar Abbas and challenged elements of an American surface group. The frigate was spotted by two Lizard A-6Es while they were flying surface combat air patrol for USS Joseph Strauss (DDG-16). Sahand fired missiles at the A-6Es, and the U.S. A6-Es replied with two Harpoon missiles and four laser-guided Skipper bombs. USS Joseph Strauss fired a Harpoon. Most, if not all of the shots



scored hits, causing heavy damage and fires. Fires blazing on Sahand's decks eventually reached her munitions magazines, causing an explosion that sank the vessel.

Late in the day, the Iranian frigate IS Sabalan (F73), departed from its berth and fired a surface-to-air missile at several A-6Es from VA-95. The Intruders then dropped a Mark 82 laser-guided bomb into the Sabalan's smokestack, crippling the ship and leaving it burning. The Iranian frigate, stern partially submerged, was taken in tow by an Iranian tug, and was repaired and eventually returned to service. VA-95's aircraft, as ordered, did not continue the attack. The A-6 pilot who crippled the

Sabalan was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross by Admiral William J. Crowe, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, for the actions against the Sabalan and the Iranian gunboats.[6]

Iran may have fired Silkworm missiles from land bases against SAG Delta in the Strait of Hormuz and against USS Gary (FFG-51) in the northern central Persian Gulf. U.S. officials, in their after-action report, said there was no evidence of this.[7] Lee Allen Zatarain in "Tanker War" presents evidence that Iran did launch missiles, which were engaged by the targeted U.S. Navy ships without damage.[citation needed]



Disengagement

Following the attack on the IS Sabalan, U.S. naval forces were ordered to assume a de-escalatory posture, giving Iran a way out and avoiding further combat. Iran took the offer and combat ceased, though both sides remained on alert, and near clashes occurred throughout the night and into the next day as the forces steamed within the Gulf. Two days after the battle, the USS Lynde McCormick (DDG 8) was directed to escort a U.S. oiler out through the Strait of Hormuz. (A Scandinavian flagged merchant remained near, probably for protection.) While the ships remained alert, no hostile indications were received, and the clash was over.

Aftermath

By the end of the operation, American Marines, ships and aircraft had damaged Iranian naval and intelligence facilities on two inoperable oil platforms in the Persian Gulf, and sunk at least three armed Iranian speedboats, one Iranian frigate and one fast attack gunboat. One other Iranian frigate was damaged in the battle.[8] Sabalan was repaired in 1989 and has since been upgraded, and is still in service with the Iranian navy. In short, Iran lost one major warship and a smaller

gunboat. Damage to the oil platforms was eventually repaired and they are now back in service.



The U.S. side suffered two casualties, the crew of a Marine Corps AH-1T Sea Cobra helicopter gunship. The Cobra, attached to the USS Trenton, was flying reconnaissance from the Wainwright and crashed sometime after dark about 15 miles southwest of Abu Musa island. The bodies of Capt. Stephen C. Leslie, 30, of New Bern, N.C., and Capt. Kenneth W. Hill, 33, of

Thomasville, N.C., were recovered by Navy divers in May, and the wreckage of the helicopter was raised later that month. Navy officials said it showed no sign of battle damage.[9]

The guided missile cruiser USS Vincennes was called to protect the extraction of the Roberts and arrived a month later. The heightened tensions contributed to the crew of the Vincennes mistakenly shooting down a commercial airliner on a routine flight, Iran Air Flight 655, killing all 290 crew and passengers on 3 July, less than two months after her arrival. According to the U.S. government, the Iranian Airbus was erroneously identified as an attacking military F-14 fighter. The Iranian government, however, maintains that the Vincennes knowingly shot down a civilian aircraft.



Operation Praying Mantis is one of five American naval engagements cited by United States Naval Academy Prof. Craig L. Symonds in his book *Decision at Sea* (2005) as being decisive in establishing U.S. naval superiority. The others were the Battle of Lake Erie (1813), the Battle of Hampton Roads (1862), the Battle of Manila Bay (1898), and the Battle of Midway (1942).

On 6 November 2003 the International Court of Justice dismissed Iran's claim for reparation against the United States for breach of the 1955 Treaty of Amity between the two countries. The court also dismissed a counterclaim by the United States for reparation for breach of the same treaty. The court ruled in favor of neither party, saying that "the actions of the United States of America against Iranian oil platforms on 19 October 1987 (Operation Nimble Archer) and 18

April 1988 (Operation Praying Mantis) cannot be justified as measures necessary to protect the essential security interests of the United States of America." The Court ruled it "...cannot however uphold the submission of the Islamic Republic of Iran that those actions constitute a breach of the obligations of the United States of America under Article X, paragraph 1, of that Treaty, regarding freedom of commerce between the territories of the parties, and that, accordingly, the claim of the Islamic Republic of Iran for reparation also cannot be



upheld;"[3]

[edit] U.S. naval order of battle

Officer in Tactical Command: Commander Joint Task Force Middle East (aboard USS Coronado)[10]

Battle Group Commander: Commander, Cruiser/Destroyer Group Three (aboard USS Enterprise)

Surface Action Group Bravo

On Scene Commander: Commander, Destroyer Squadron Nine (Embarked on the Merrill)

USS Merrill (DD-976) – destroyer

USS Lynde McCormick (DDG-8) – guided missile destroyer

USS Trenton (LPD-14) – amphibious transport dock

Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) 2-88 (4 AH-1T, 2 UH-1, 2 CH-46)

Surface Action Group Charlie

OSC: CO, USS Wainwright

USS Wainwright (DLG/CG-28) – guided missile cruiser

USS Bagley (FF-1069) – frigate

USS Simpson (FFG-56) – guided missile frigate

SEAL platoon

Surface Action Group Delta

OSC: Commander Destroyer Squadron Twenty Two (Embarked on the Jack Williams)

USS Jack Williams (FFG-24) – guided missile frigate

USS O'Brien (DD-975) – destroyer

USS Joseph Strauss (DDG-16) – guided missile destroyer

Air support

**NO MORE
WAR!**

NO WAR



IN IRAN

Elements of Carrier Air Wing
Eleven operating from aircraft carrier
USS Enterprise (CVN-65)

A-6E & KA-6D Intruders of 95th
All Weather Attack Squadron
operating from aircraft carrier USS
Enterprise (CVN-65)

[edit] See also

Operation Prime Chance
Operation Earnest Will
Iran Air Flight 655

Operation PRAYING MANTIS Combat Operations vs. Iran 1988

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92UFda7srck>

**Dwight D. Eisenhower, Speech,
Warning America About The Military-Industrial Complex**

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_II0H7X5O4

SOURCE https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Praying_Mantis



"My ardent desire is, and my aim has been...to comply strictly with all our engagements foreign and domestic; but to keep the United States free from political connections with every other Country. To see that they may be independent of all, and under the influence of none. In a word, I want an American character, that the powers of Europe may be convinced we act for ourselves and not for others; this, in my judgment, is the only way to be respected abroad and happy at home."

George Washington (letter to Patrick Henry, 9 October 1775)

"I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country. Corporations have been enthroned, an era of corruption in high places will follow, and the money-power of the country will endeavor to prolong it's reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until the wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the Republic is destroyed."

